



## CITY ESCAPES



Lake Merritt

# Transformative OAKLAND

BY KRISTIN HANES

IT'S CLEAR WHEN I SIT DOWN at an al fresco patio restaurant near Lake Merritt in Oakland, California that this isn't your average brunch spot. The place is packed with the full splendour of humanity on this sunny afternoon: tattooed hipsters, retirees with small dogs, young couples, a perfectly-coiffed white-haired gentleman who may have just stepped off the pages of *GQ*.

But it's the food – the mouth-watering food! – at Grand Lake Kitchen that captivates me. Waiters rush past with plates loaded with thick, crusty bread and oozing eggs, heaping baby kale salads shimmering with light dressing, and pieces of bright pink lox. I order the salmon benedict; my cousin picks the tartine, an astonishing plate that's more reminiscent of artwork than food. One slice of country levain bread is topped with fresh ricotta cheese, sliced avocado, summer berries, a drizzle of honey and

a smattering of delicate flowers. It's the perfect meal for a perfect day in the Grand Lake area of Oakland.

Over the past few years, Oakland has undergone a transformation: People and businesses trying to escape expensive San Francisco rents have flocked to the city across the bay, turning it into a trendy smorgasbord of restaurants and boutiques. What I love about Oakland is its diversity; while San Francisco is arguably becoming more about the "haves" and "have nots," Oakland feels proudly global and inclusive.

The food scene is one in which the diversity is especially evident, attracting top chefs interested in starting new restaurant concepts. There's Bakesale Betty, which has revitalized the chicken sandwich, and Souley Vegan, which is a vegan soul food restaurant. No matter your taste buds or price point, there's a meal for everyone in Oakland.

Before sitting down to brunch at

Grand Lake Kitchen, my cousin and I first met at Lake Merritt, where we'd enjoyed the five-kilometre paved path that winds around this tidal lagoon. Joggers take a moment out of their busy workday to exercise there; parents play with babies in the fresh cut green grass. The lake smells like the sea and rises and falls with the tide. It feels like the heart of Oakland, where people of all ages and walks of life go to enjoy the fresh air, the trees, the flocks of geese. Every city needs a soul – a place where people gather to enjoy nature and each other.

Oakland not only has nature interspersed with its urbanity, but forests, creeks and meadows. Just a short jaunt into the Oakland hills reveals a network of hiking trails for people wanting to escape the crush of humanity. I've taken many a solitary walk within the trees, breathing deeply, centering myself in one of the biggest metropolitan areas in the United States.

When in Oakland, the city pride is evident. It may be sometimes thought of as San Francisco's little sister, but Oakland has its own sense of self; its own music, its own food, its own people. Oakland is a treasure, a unique oasis along the glistening bay. ✪

### When You Go

**WHAT TO DO:** Discover the diverse neighbourhoods of Oakland, from the Bay views of **Jack London District**, the eclectic cultural mix of **KONO** or the preserved late century architecture of **Old Oakland**.

**WHERE TO DINE:** For an awesome dining experience in a venue dedicated to sourcing local, responsibly-raised animals, plan a meal at **Clove & Hoof**. Enjoy a good drink? Look into the Oakland Ale Trail or Oakland's Urban Wine Trail for some tasty inspo.

**WHERE TO STAY:** For quick access to downtown Oakland paired with a comfortable stay, lay your head at **Oakland Marriott City Center**. The 47-room **Washington Inn** is another reliable option, located in the Old Oakland area.